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BOOKS OF MEDIEVAL AND MODERN HISTORY

Shakespeare's England: an Account of the Life and Manners of his Age. In two volumes. (London: Oxford University Press. 1916. Pp. xxiv, 546; x, 610.)

AMONG the numberless memorials of the tercentenary of the death of the great dramatist this handsome and learned work is by no means one of the least worthy, and it may well prove to be one of the most permanent. Two sumptuous volumes published by one of the great universities and embodying investigations into all phases of the period of Shakespeare by some forty of England's leading writers in history, literature, and archaeology form certainly an interesting tribute to the poet and his times. It is professedly a memorial work. It is permeated through and through with Shakespeare. There is no aspect of the life of the English people in the last two decades of Elizabeth and the first of James for the elucidation or illumination of which some phrase from his works is not utilized. Indeed it may be confessed by even an appreciative critic that this perpetual remembrance and ingenious use of quotations becomes at times almost wearisome, and verges on that "damnable iteration" which even the dramatist himself deprecates. More than two thousand passages from Shakespeare's works are cited in the two volumes and the references are duly gathered, classified, and indexed at the close of the work. It is a striking indication of the infinite variety of the great poet that there are extremely few instances in which the same quotation is used on more than one occasion. It is also a proof of the extent to which the Elizabethan drama mirrored its time that something is to be found in Shakespeare or contemporary dramatists illustrative of every one of the varied subjects treated in these volumes.

The ode by the poet laureate which opens the work is a sombre reflection of this period of war rather than of the less heavily clouded period to which it refers: its yearning for peace, its effort to forget the desolation of the present in its theme of the past with its recurrent note of return to the things of to-day make it essentially a memorial poem of the year 1916. Sir Walter Raleigh's introductory essay on the "Age of Elizabeth", on the other hand, opens as spiritedly as the period to which it refers, though it soon drops from great names and conceptions to a description of the smaller antiquities of custom and costume of the time. The fact is, no single essay can give the characteristics of an age, certainly not of the Elizabethan age. It is only by a cumulative process that a real and correct impression can be given; and those who have had charge of this work have done well to seek this result in the chapters which follow without much regard to order or unity.

The essay on religion is preoccupied with Shakespeare's religion,

though it contains much interesting material concerning the established church as well as the reactionary Catholicism and the militant Puritanism of the time. There is a full and picturesque description of the queen's court by Mr. Chambers, the author of works on the medieval and later drama, followed by chapters on the army and navy, exploration by sea and travel by land, educational and intellectual interests, commerce and coinage, agriculture, medicine and natural history, by equally well-known specialists. There is an interesting and original chapter on a little considered subject, that of sixteenth-century handwriting, by Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, librarian of the British Museum, illuminated by ten or twelve facsimile pages and followed by a minute and technical study of Shakespeare's autograph signatures. The chapter on the Courts and the Law, perhaps from the inherent difficulties of the subject, is not quite up to the general level. It is incoherent, somewhat perfunctory, and in many points inaccurate. The unpopularity of the Court of Star Chamber is antedated and exaggerated, its independence of law and precedent misrepresented, and the familiar misstatement that it made use of torture in its procedure repeated. Peacham, whose prosecution the writer gives as an instance, was tried before the Court of High Commission, examined by the Privy Council, and put to torture before commissioners of the Council, not the Court of Star Chamber. He was finally tried and convicted at the assizes in Somerset; but neither he nor any other culprit was ever "interrogated on the rack before the Star Chamber".

The order of subjects is, as already stated, somewhat irregular. As successive chapters in the second volume on music, architecture, painting, and similar subjects lead on to Authors and their Patrons, Booksellers and Printers, Actors, the Playhouse, and the Masque, it would seem that the work was to find its natural culmination in the drama and allied subjects; but there follow upon these still other chapters on horsemanship, dancing, games, rogues and vagabonds. The work closes however in a more literary spirit with chapters on "Ballads and Broad-sides" and on "Shakespeare's English".

Attention must be called to the excellent illustrations, of which there are more than two hundred, all contemporary and almost all apposite. The problem of finding a satisfactory clue to the contents of a work of such varied character is as difficult as it is important. It has been well solved by a group of three excellent indexes, the one already mentioned—of the quotations from Shakespeare's works, an index of proper names, and a general index. The bibliographies of the various subjects are suggestive though hardly adequate. Altogether this is a notable and excellent work, a highly creditable contribution to English *Kulturgeschichte*, if a German technical word may be applied to an English literary production without offense. Its learning is solid, and, varied as are its contents, unity is to be found in their connection with the works of a great writer in a great age.

E. P. CHEYNEY.